

## **Good news on helping terns and plovers**

Since 1995, the Corps has collected 456 tern eggs and 575 piping plover eggs for captive rearing. Of these, 83% of the tern eggs and 82% of the plover eggs successfully hatched. During the same period, 7,072 tern eggs and 9,275 plover eggs were laid and attended in the wild. Of these, 60.5% of tern eggs and 61.7% of plover eggs hatched. Hatching rates in the controlled setting are 22.4% higher for terns and 19.3% higher for plovers than their wild counterparts.

Of the chicks hatched in the captive facility, 81.2% tern and 87.6% plover chicks fledged and were released back onto the Missouri River or its tributaries. This compares with wild fledge rates of 58.8% for terns and 58.7% for plovers during the same period.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison conducted “An Evaluation of Captive Rearing as a Management Tool for Piping Plovers in the Great Plains” from 1998-2000. This research project showed that pre-migratory post-release survival of captive reared birds was the same as wild reared birds. Of the captive reared birds that returned to the breeding grounds, six paired with wild adults and nested. All exhibited normal incubating and defensive behaviors.

The number of chicks that fledge per adult pair is the measure of how well a population is doing. The Fish and Wildlife Service has established a goal of .70 chicks per pair of adults for terns and 1.13 per pair of adults for plovers, computed on a 3-year running average, as the goal for the Missouri River. Achieving this production rate insures the population is stable or rising. During the 2002 nesting season, a record 1,134 piping plovers adults were found on the Missouri River system.

They produced a record number of fledged chicks. The 3-year running average fledge ratio for 2000 –2002 was 1.64, well above the established goal. Tern nesting was also very successful during 2002. The third highest fledge ratio and the second highest number of chicks fledged were obtained in 2002. The 3-year running average fledge ratio for the years 2000-2002 was 1.18 for terns, also well above the established goal. The 3-year running average fledge ratio goal has been equaled or exceeded for both species since 1998.